George Hearst Biography

George Hearst

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Biography

George Hearst (1820-1891), American publisher and U.S. senator, began as a prospector and acquired vast claims in gold and copper mines.

George Hearst was born on Sept. 3, 1820, in Franklin County, Mo. His boyhood work in the Missouri lead mines induced him to enroll in the Franklin County Mining School. He graduated in 1838. In 1850 he went to the California goldfields but found little gold.

For a time Hearst operated a general store at Nevada City, Calif., but an attempt to establish a branch in Sacramento proved financially disastrous. Returning to mining, he at last struck a paying prospect--the Lecompton mine--at Nevada City. In 1859 he joined the rush to the Washoe Valley of Nevada. In partnership with James Haggin and Lloyd Tevis, Hearst became owner of several of the most promising mines on the Comstock Lode. Hearst continually expanded his holdings and also acquired mining properties in Utah, Nevada, and California, and also in Peru, Chile, and Mexico.

By the early 1870s the firm of Hearst, Haggin, Tevis and Company was becoming the single largest firm of private mine owners in the nation. However, Hearst suffered severe reversals in the depression of 1873. Yet, at the very moment when his fortune seemed on the wane, he invested in what became the two most profitable mining ventures of his career: the Homestake gold mine in the Black Hills of South Dakota and the Anaconda copper prospect in Montana.

Like other business titans, Hearst made large contributions to political parties and ultimately sought public office. In 1865 California's pro-South element elected him to the state legislature. He served one term and cast the only vote against ratification of the 13th Amendment. He then devoted himself to business activities until 1882, when he sought the Democratic gubernatorial nomination and was narrowly defeated.

Needing a public forum to further his political ambition, Hearst entered the newspaper business in 1880, acquiring the *San Francisco Daily Examiner*. When he achieved his political goal 7 years later, he turned the *Examiner* over to his son, William Randolph Hearst.

In 1885 the Democrats supported Hearst for the Senate, but he was defeated by railroad magnate Leland Stanford. The following year, however, on the death of California's senior senator, Hearst was appointed to fill the vacancy. In 1889 he was elected to a full term. He died on Feb. 28, 1891, while serving in Washington.